the last three years and the number of such bridges constructed so far; and

(b) by when the remaining bridges are likely to be constructed?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI BANDARU DATTATRAYA): (a) At present, 26 ROBs/RUBs are under construction, out of which, 10 were sanctioned during last three years *i.e.* 5 on cost sharing basis, 4 under B.O. T. Scheme and 1 on deposit terms. 7 such works were completed during last three years.

(b) It will depend on commencement & completion of work on approaches to be done by the State Govt. Railways will make every effort to complete work on bridge proper simultaneously with the work of approaches.

Opposition of creation of railway zones

445. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the move to create additional railway zones was consistently opposed by the Railway Board on financial, administrative and technical grounds from the very inception, till as late as November last year;

(b) whether the move was also opposed by the Standing Parliamentary Committee of Railways for self-same reasons; and

(c) if so, the reasons for creating the zones in the wake of professional and technical opposition from all quarters?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI BANDARU DATTATRAYA): (a) After the decision to create new zones was taken in 1996-98, steps were taken to create them by posting of Officers-on-Special Duty and some skeleton staff. Part infrastructure was also built. One Division was attached with each zone. Provisions were made in the Budget every year and funds were provided. Subsequently due to resource crunch in view of the increase in expenditure after Vth Central Pay Commission, the creation of new zones has been progressing slowly. There was also debate

on the jurisdiction of new zones in view of certain conflicting demands.

(b) The Standing Committee of Parliament on Railways had examined the issue of creation of zones in 1996 and had questioned the decision to go for six zones in one go. The Committee advocated a phased approach to the creation of new zones, that too on the basis of workload, efficiency and effective management and to develop model office. The Committee was replied indicating Government's policy of phased approach and building model new zonal offices.

(c) As already mentioned, the decision to create zones was taken in 1996—98. Creation of new zones had been progressing slowly for the past six years. It was recently decided to operationalise the new zones. The two zones, North Western Railway/ Jaipur and East Central Railway/Hajipur have already been operationalised w.e.f. 01.10.2002. The other five new zones are to be operatioanlised w.e.f. 01.4.2003. This has been done in view of substantial increase in the workload and the traffic on the Railways. Also issue of operationalising the zones has been figuring in the Parliament on a number of occasions, as also there have been demands from various public representatives for making the zones fully operational.

Conversion of rail lines in Rajasthan

446. SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD:
SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have received fresh proposals from the Rajasthan Government for conversion of rail lines, from meter gauge to broad gauge;

(b) if so, by when would these proposals be finalized; and

(c) funds required for the proposed conversion projects?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI BANDARU DATTATRAYA): (a) to (c) The details of fresh